



June is National Dairy Month

Cows, Inmate Workers' Self-Esteem Raised at Corcoran Prison Dairy

by Amy Roberts

Ask Rick Koelewyn about the Corcoran State Prison dairy and it's clear that he's passionate about what it offers then the realization hits that milk production plays a secondary role to the greater good the program

Dairy Stats:

Approx. number of cows: 815

Creamery: produces enough half pints of milk to supply seven prisons.

Farms: Two farms totaling 660 acres grow all the alfalfa and corn and wheat silage to feed the cows.

Salaries: Beginning workers earn 30 cents an hour; top men earn 95 cents an hour. If part of the inmate's sentence requires restitution payment to victims, earnings go toward that responsibility.

Crews: Five crews with a total of 78 men who work different shifts 24/7. Shifts work five days with 2 days off.

gives inmates in learning life changing responsibilities.

"I think this is a great program and I love talking about it," he said. "The prison offers other work programs, but the dairy is the only one the inmates have to work holidays and it's a work ethic they don't learn anywhere else."

Up until 18 months ago Koelewyn held the superintendent II of agriculture position until he was promoted to the job as the prison industries manager, but he continues to care deeply about the ag program. In his new job he oversees all the prison work industries including the dairy and farm operations.

While the dairy won a number of milk quality awards under his watch, Koelewyn is quick to point out that Oscar Rodriguez, who took over his old job, continues doing a great job making sure the dairy

maintains its award winning ways.

When asked how the dairy consistently wins the lowest somatic cell count award from the Kings County Dairy Herd Improvement Association, which in 2005 averaged 108,000 cells per milliliter compared to the state average of 293,000, Koelewyn outlined a rigorous procedural process the inmates must follow.

"We pay very close attention to details when it comes to the bedding in the free stalls," he said. "We make sure they are kept extremely clean and dry at all times and we have a written procedure in place in the milking parlors that all our inmate milkers have to follow."

Before working in this capacity



Rick Koelewyn and Oscar Rodriguez

the men are trained on following the set of procedures and then they have to sign a form acknowledging that they understand what is expected of them if they plan to work in the dairy.

One of the most important points

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Dairy cows at the Corcoran Prison Dairy.

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the men must follow, Koelewyn said, is making sure the cows are clean and dry before being milked.

Having the men follow this set of procedures, including the cows getting pre-dip and post dip iodine teat treatments, keeps our somatic counts low, he said.

"The inmates take pride in winning this award," Koelewyn said. "They care of the animals and the supervisory staff also cares about what they do."

A total of five supervisors—one for each of the five crews—are responsible for the program, he said.

The dairy operation also uses Dairy Comp 305, a computer based management program from Valley Ag Software to monitor chronic high somatic cell counts in cows, which has been a proven method on this dairy to removing non-performing animals from the herd.

The dairy also has an important interagency agreement with the UC Davis Vet Med Teaching Center in Tulare (VTRC) working in its favor.

We work closely with Jose Santos and the VTRC, Koelewyn said.

"They do all our veterinary work and it's a really good relationship which

benefits both organizations," he said.

Koelewyn explained that the dairy is part of PIA, or Prison Industry Authority, which is an inmate employability program designed to give the men job training so when they are paroled they can find gainful work and become productive citizens upon their release.

"If they work a set number of hours and work well they can earn a certificate of proficiency to take with them to find a job," he said.

There is also an employee who helps the men find jobs.

"It's kind of a new program," Koelewyn said, "and now that we've starting tracking these men it's beginning to show success. Working on a dairy teaches these men a work ethic that they've never experienced before. They are learning the discipline of coming to work and being responsible."

There are a number of certificates men can earn from outside sources including artificial insemination and licenses to be a pasteurizer or weigh sampler. A few samples of internal certificates of proficiency awarded include milker, tractor drivers and welding. To receive a certificate, inmates must exhibit good behavior on and off the job.